

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 TEGUCI 01492 281655Z

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 1492

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, ELAB, SHUM, HO

SUBJ: LAWYER'S COMMISSION SAYS ISLETAS PRISONERS WRONGLY HELD

REF: (A) TEGUCIGALPA 322, (B) TEGUCIGALPA 1241, (C) 77 TEGUCI-
GALPA A-58

1. A COMMISSION APPOINTED BY THE HONDURAN LAWYERS ASSOCIATION AND HEADED BY EX-PRESIDENT (1971-1972) ROMAN CRUZ HAS ISSUED A REPORT CONCLUDING THAT THE FORMER LEADERS OF THE ISLETAS BANANA GROWERS ASSOCIATION (REF A) ARE BEING WRONGLY HELD. THE REPORT DOES NOT ADDRESS THE POSSIBLE INNOCENCE OR GUILT OF THESE PERSONS ON CHARGES OF MISUSE OF THE COOPERATIVE'S FUNDS, BUT CITES A NUMBER OF LEGAL ERRORS MADE IN HANDLING THE CASE.

2. THE FORMER LEADERS OF THE ISLETAS ASSOCIATION, WHICH SELLS ITS PRODUCTION UNDER CONTRACT TO STANDARD FRUIT, WERE ARRESTED IN FEBRUARY, 1977. THEY HAVE SINCE BEEN HELD IN THE TRUJILLO JAIL WHILE THE JUDGE HEARS TESTIMONY AND INVESTIGATES ALLEGATIONS. A NUMBER OF GROUPS IN HONDURAS HAVE CLAIMED THAT THEIR DETENTION IS POLITICALLY MOTIVATED. HOWEVER, OTHERS POINT TO THE CHARGES LEVELLED AGAINST THEM. THE DETENTION OF THESE PERSONS HAS BEEN NOTED IN AN ARTICLE PUBLISHED (REF B) BY THE NORTH AMERICAN COUNCIL ON LATIN AMERICA (NACLA) AND APPARENTLY ACCUSING STANDARD FRUIT OF BEING RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR ARREST.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 TEGUCI 01492 281655Z

3. THE NACLA ARTICLE ALSO ALLEGEDLY ACCUSES STANDARD FRUIT OF ENGINEERING THE OVERTHROW OF THE COMMUNIST LEADERS OF ITS UNION (SUTRAFSCO) AND THEIR REPLACEMENT (REF C, PAGE 3) IN MARCH, 1977. UNION LEADERS DENY THIS. SUTRAFSCO IS ONE OF THE TWO LARGEST, BEST ORGANIZED AND MOST IMPORTANT UNIONS IN THE COUNTRY, THE OTHER BEING THE UNITED BRANDS UNION. BOTH ARE BANANA WORKERS UNIONS.

SUTRAFSO WAS RECENTLY VISITED BY THE EMBASSY LABOR OFFICER WHO NOTED THAT UNION'S MATURITY, SERVICES TO ITS MEMBERS AND THE CLEAR SUPPORT THE PRESENT LEADERSHIP HAS AMONG THE RANK AND FILE.

4. COMMENT: A DECISION IS EXPECTED SOON ON THE FATE OF THE ISLETAS PRISONERS, WHO HAVE, IN FACT, BEEN CHARGED WITH EMBEZZLEMENT AND WHOSE CASE IS BEING CONSIDERED UNDER HONDURAN LEGAL PROCEDURES. IF THE LAWYER'S ASSOCIATION REPORT IS ACCURATE, A NUMBER OF LEGAL ERRORS MAY HAVE BEEN MADE IN THE HANDLING OF THE CASE. AND, AS OFTEN HAPPENS IN HONDURAN COURTS, THE CELERITY OF A TRIAL AND TREATMENT OF THE ACCUSED IN MANY CASES DEPENDS UPON THE DEGREE OF INFLUENCE AND WEALTH THAT PERSON POSSESSES. NEVERTHELESS, THE METHOD OF REPLACING THE COMMUNIST LEADERSHIP OF THE COOPERATIVE AND SUTRAFSO, BOTH IMPORTANT ORGANIZATIONS, HAS BEEN THE SAME (I.E. ACCUSATIONS OF MISUSE OF FUNDS FOLLOWED BY REMOVAL AND THE ELECTION OF NEW LEADERSHIP WHICH IS RAPIDLY RECOGNIZED BY THE APPROPRIATE GOVERNMENT AUTHORITY). THERE IS NO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THE COMMUNIST LEADERSHIP IS ANY PURER THAN ITS DEMOCRATIC RIVALS. IN FACT, GIVEN THAT THE LEVEL OF HUMAN RESOURCES IS LOW AND BOOKEEPING PRACTICES RUDIMENTARY, EVEN WITH NO CRIMINAL INTENT, IT IS OFTEN NOT POSSIBLE TO ACCOUNT FOR ALL FUNDS. THIS MANUEVER, POSSIBLY ENCOURAGED BY SOME GOH OFFICIALS, HAS WORKED WHEN THE RANK AND FILE LOST CONFIDENCE IN ITS OWN LEADERSHIP.

5. AS THE EMBASSY HAS PREVIOUSLY OBSERVED, THERE APPEARS TO BE A CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 TEGUCI 01492 281655Z

GROWING AWARENESS AND CONCERN FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AMONG ORGANIZED HONDURAN GROUPS. AMONG THE INDICATIONS OF THIS ARE THE LAWYER'S ASSOCIATION COMMISSION; THE RECENT VIGOROUS DEFENSE OF PRESS FREEDOM BY DAILY 'TIEMPO' SUPPORTED BY NUMEROUS CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS (TEGUCIGALPA 1311); AND THE QUESTIONS RAISED ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS AFTER THE SO-CALLED OCTOBER COUP ATTEMPT (77 TEGUCIGALPA 5818). THIS DEVELOPMENT MAY BE A RESULT OF THE U.S. HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN, BUT CAN PROBABLY ALSO BE ASCRIBED TO INCREASING AWARENESS AS A RESULT OF HONDURAS' OWN MOVEMENT TOWARDS A RETURN TO DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT. IN EITHER CASE, THIS DEVELOPMENT IS A HEALTHY ONE.
JARAMILLO

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